United Nations A/C.3/53/SR.19

General Assembly
Fifty-third session

Official Records

Distr.: General
9 November 1998

Original: English

Third Committee

Summary record of the 19th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 21 October 1998, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Hachani ..... (Tunisia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 106: Promotion and protection of the rights of children (*continued*) (A/53/41, A/53/57, A/53/72-S/1998/156, A/53/95-S/1998/311, A/53/281, 311 and 482)

1. **Mrs. Smolcic** (Uruguay) said that her delegation supported the statement made on the agenda item on behalf of the Rio Group. Uruguay reiterated its concern about the need to find a speedy way to alleviate the suffering of children affected by armed conflict and underscored the important work carried out by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. The conclusions and recommendations set forth in his report (A/53/482) constituted an effective guide for future action. Her country attached great importance to the debate conducted in the Security Council on the participation of children in armed conflict and hoped that it would make the rights of children a subject of special concern in dealing with humanitarian crises caused by armed conflicts.

2. Her country reiterated its support for the Special Representative's efforts to improve the situation of children affected by armed conflict and promote their subsequent rehabilitation. It reaffirmed its commitment to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Landmines and on their Destruction, and noted with satisfaction the efforts of the signatory countries to ensure its universal ratification. Uruguay commended the work of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and had supported the Declaration and Agenda for Action adopted at the 1996 World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children.

3. Her country had begun a far-reaching process aimed at updating its legislation in order to bring it into harmony with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In addition, Uruguay had signed an agreement with UNICEF to evaluate the situation with regard to child labour, particularly those under 14 years of age, and had taken steps to improve schooling with the help of specialized teachers, psychologists and social assistants and through the construction of new schools. The National Family and Women's Institute provided a support system to assist the children who were mistreated.

4. Her delegation hoped that the work of elaborating the draft optional protocols on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and on the involvement of children in armed conflict would be concluded speedily.

5. **Mr. Melenevs'ky** (Ukraine) said that problems such as the situation of children affected by armed conflict, the sexual exploitation of children, the situation of disabled and street children and the problem of child labour required immediate solutions. He emphasized the importance of the appeal made at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights urging universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its implementation by all States parties. There was a need to establish a universal mechanism that would penalize the perpetrators of crimes against children, especially in armed conflicts. His delegation strongly supported the work on the draft optional protocol to the Convention relating to the involvement of children in armed conflict.

6. The sexual exploitation of children constituted a particularly shameful violation of children's rights. The role of national justice systems, the media and educational institutions in protecting children should be made more effective and action-oriented. It was also necessary to consider more thoroughly the need to continue the drafting of the optional protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, which might duplicate the work of other United Nations bodies.

7. Ukraine was focusing its attention on strengthening its legal regime for protecting the rights of the child. It had elaborated a draft declaration on principles of State policy concerning children and women, and had adopted a national programme to implement the commitments that it had undertaken at the World Summit for Children. Unfortunately, the current economic stagnation in Ukraine and the aftermath of the 1986 Chernobyl accident had a negative impact on the situation of children. He expressed his country's deep gratitude for the assistance provided by UNICEF in improving the situation of children in Ukraine and looked forward to further cooperation with the Fund.

8. **Mr. Du Zhenqguan** (China) said that the Convention on the Rights of the Child had been a major step forward in the field of international human rights. Nevertheless, long-term efforts were still needed to ensure that its provisions were incorporated into laws and implemented in everyday life. His delegation supported the efforts of Governments and the international community to combat such problems as trafficking in children, child labour, the abuse of children and the situation of children in armed conflict.

9. China supported the work done on the draft optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. At the same time, all necessary measures should be taken to facilitate the physical and psychological rehabilitation of the children who had been victimized and to promote their

reintegration in society. His Government supported the statement by the Security Council on the item "Children and armed conflict" and appealed to all parties to such conflicts to abide strictly by international humanitarian law. In addition, in view of the harm caused to children by economic sanctions, it was important to exercise caution in imposing sanctions in order to avoid victimizing children.

10. **Mr. Bhatti** (Pakistan) observed that 1.3 billion people in the world lived below the poverty line and that half of that number were children. The financial and economic crisis in South-East Asia threatened to push millions more into poverty. The debt burden also served to perpetuate poverty since net debt service payments by developing countries exceeded the total flow of external aid to those countries. The steady decline in aid over the past decade had also affected the situation of the world's children.

11. The report of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (A/53/311) gave harrowing details of child abuse. Trafficking in human beings for prostitution and pornography was an affront to human dignity and deserved the strongest condemnation. His delegation hoped that the Special Rapporteur's recommendations would receive serious consideration by the Committee.

12. The plight of children affected by armed conflict was another issue of grave concern. In some cases like Kosovo, Palestine and Kashmir, the Governments concerned had brutalized the entire population in their efforts to bludgeon them into submission. The United Nations must strengthen its capacities to address the root causes of armed conflict in order to bring an end to the misery faced by millions of women and children around the world. The report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (A/53/482) contained useful recommendations.

13. Pakistan attached special importance to promoting and protecting the rights of the child. It had withdrawn its reservations to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had initiated a reform of its laws concerning children to bring them into harmony with that instrument. His country had also taken a number of steps to eliminate the exploitation of child labour. The Employment of Children Act prohibited child labour and was being strictly implemented. At the regional level, Pakistan was coordinating steps with other member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to eliminate child labour and trafficking in women and girls. His Government believed that a key factor to that end was the empowerment of all segments of society through universal access to education, primary health care and other social services. It sought to ensure universal access to primary and secondary education, and, in order to ensure that the girl child had equal access to education, had decided to reserve 70 per cent of new primary schools in rural areas for girls.

14. **Mr. Bune** (Fiji) said that his country was committed to fulfilling its obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and had established a coordinating committee on children to oversee the implementation of that instrument. Fiji, which was not immune to paedophile activities by persons from outside the country, had enacted new laws to deal with persons engaging in such illicit activities. The Government had also established administrative and protective mechanisms in the Departments of Social Welfare and of Police.

15. Fiji recognized the importance of education in the development of its human resources. Education was compulsory for children under the age of 13 years, and enrolment in primary classes was about 98 per cent. The Government was committed to increasing access to quality education for the rural and urban poor and expanding pre-school education and vocational training. There were differences among Fiji's various ethnic groups with regard to sensitive issues such as corporal punishment and the minimum age for marriage. His delegation believed that corporal punishment played an important role in instilling discipline in young children. In schools, however, only principals and head teachers were authorized to administer corporal punishment. While it sought to protect and promote the interests of its children, Fiji believed that other vulnerable groups, such as the disabled and senior citizens, equally deserved special assistance.

16. Unless small island States like Fiji received all possible international assistance, it was unlikely that they would be able to implement fully the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in spite of their commitment to do so. The ultimate text of the efficacy of the Convention was whether children were freed from poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

17. **Mr. Al-Khurainej** (Kuwait) said that the family and youth were guaranteed social protection under Kuwait's Constitution, which viewed the family as the cornerstone of society and the custodian of religious and patriotic values. Young people were assured protection from exploitation and from educational, physical or spiritual neglect and had access to services aimed at realizing their full potential.

18. Kuwait had adopted a five-year plan, incorporating welfare programmes for children, youth, families and groups

with special needs, particularly the mentally handicapped, delinquents and potential delinquents.

19. Comprehensive provision was made for the welfare of mothers and children and for the removal of social, economic and legal barriers to women's full participation in society and in the workforce. By 1993, nine children's centres had been established throughout Kuwait, offering recreational and cultural facilities and promoting social and creative skills. Special nurseries had also been established, while programmes for mothers and children provided comprehensive health care.

20. Young children received free and timely vaccination against polio, measles and tuberculosis, the incidence of which had fallen continuously since 1988. The infant-mortality rate had also fallen.

21. Kuwait had long understood the importance of education in socializing children, in shaping the opportunities available to them and preparing them for work. For that reason, it had introduced universal compulsory education at the primary and middle-school levels.

22. Iraq's tyrannical occupation of Kuwait had inflicted terrible suffering on Kuwaiti children. They had been killed and tortured and many had died in hospitals, through lack of medical attention. Kuwait was working to alleviate the grave effects of the occupation and to provide its children with the requisite rehabilitation services.

23. **Mr. El Atwy** (Egypt) said that his delegation welcomed the almost universal ratification of or accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Egypt had become a party at an early date. Egypt sought to enhance children's rights through a national council for mothers and children and by encouraging its welfare organizations to focus on children's rights, education and health, with special care for disabled and gifted children.

24. Egypt had adopted legislation defining the State's responsibilities for the protection of children and mothers and for creating the conditions in which they could obtain an appropriate education and to live in freedom and dignity.

25. By law, all measures and decisions taken with regard to children had to gave top priority to the interests of the child. Children's fundamental rights were guaranteed with regard to education, food, housing, parental protection and property ownership. Egypt had also outlawed the employment of children in dangerous work and had imposed a number of strict working conditions, and was monitoring compliance.

26. Efforts to curb child labour by imposing protectionist measures on exports from developing countries had been made without reference to the Governments involved. There was a need to address its root causes, namely poverty and under-development. In many impoverished societies, children themselves wished to work, in order to help the family survive. By forcing children out of work, one could push them into more harmful activities that would ultimately undermine society.

27. Egypt would resist all attempts at establishing a link between minimum working standards and international trade, under the guise of children's rights. Vocational rehabilitation programmes should be set up, with the financial support of donor countries, for children that no longer attended school.

28. Egypt encouraged both UNICEF and ILO to continue their cooperation with developing countries on child labour and appreciated their efforts thus far.

29. Egypt attached great importance to the speedy adoption of the two draft optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The raising of the age limit for recruitment of children in armed conflict would mark a significant step forward, while the International Criminal Court, when established, could take measures to ensure compliance.

30. UNICEF had done sterling work to prevent recruitment of children in armed conflict, to secure the demobilization of ex-child soldiers, to reunite children separated from their patents and to protect children affected by armed conflict and organized violence, ensuring their psychosocial reintegration.

31. The fundamental rights of children to life, physical integrity and development should be respected, even if those children were living under foreign occupation or in armed conflict. Military action against women and children, particularly in Africa and in the occupied Arab territories, should cease immediately. The international community should demonstrate the political will and allocate the financial resources to save innocent children suffering from the effects of war and to help reintegrate them into civilian life.

32. **Mr. Najem** (Lebanon) said that Lebanon had elaborated a national plan for children, focusing on education, health care, the environment, social protection and integration. Lebanon was working to achieve the educational goals of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to guarantee every Lebanese child access to health services. Programmes for social protection and integration included education for peace, the strict monitoring of printed materials to eliminate violent subject matter, the protection

of children against drug abuse, sexual violence and exploitation, and the imposition of severe penalties for offenders.

33. Lebanon had reviewed its legislation to ensure consistency with its commitments under the Convention. Its parliament had before it proposals and draft laws to address the discrepancies that had been identified.

34. It was difficult for any child to develop fully when it lived under threat of occupation, murder and displacement. Since 1978, the children of southern Lebanon and the Western Bekaa had suffered from occupation and the terrorist practices of Israeli forces. Their educational and social rights had been violated and their psychological welfare severely damaged by the constant shelling. The Israeli occupation forces had violated the most basic rights of people living in armed conflict and the international community should bring pressure to bear on them to withdraw immediately and unconditionally.

35. **Mrs. Monroy** (Mexico) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made on the agenda item on behalf of the Rio Group. She hoped that the universal ratification of or accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child would be achieved speedily and underscored the important work of elaborating the two draft optional protocols, which should be adopted before the tenth anniversary of the Convention.

36. Mexico reaffirmed its commitment to the cause of children and supported various initiatives to that end. At the national level, her Government was continuing its work in that field. Steps were being taken to broaden and improve educational and health services and to bring national legislation into conformity with the Convention. In June 1998, the National System for the Overall Development of the Family had established a commission to eradicate the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. An action plan had been drawn up on the basis of recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur, and UNICEF was providing advisory services.

37. In spite of the efforts of the international community, the world financial crisis and the negative impact of various economic and climatic factors limited the possibilities for expanding programmes to help children, particularly in developing countries. Her delegation supported the holding of a special session of the General Assembly in the year 2001 in order to consider the achievements made and set new parameters to guide the work of the international community on behalf of children in the next century. Sufficient resources were required to carry out work at the national level. Accordingly, the spirit of cooperation, which was essential to the cause of children, must be maintained.

38. **Ms. Nicodemos** (Brazil) said that despite the almost universal ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there was still a wide gap between its lofty principles and the reality of children's lives. Children's basic rights were violated on a daily basis, through child prostitution, child pornography, child labour, the experiences of children affected by armed conflict, violence and abuse.

39. International cooperation was needed to implement the Convention, while the rights of the child should be a priority in United Nations work in the field of human rights.

40. UNICEF had done commendable work on behalf of children living in exceptionally difficult conditions, as had other United Nations agencies and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Such activities both raised awareness and helped to solve acute problems affecting children. The work of the Committee on the Rights of the Child also made a useful contribution, guiding the work of national policy makers and planners.

41. Special attention should be given in implementing the Convention to children's health, nutrition, education, the improvement of family income and employment creation. For its part, Brazil had already attained most of the goals of the World Summit for Children and hoped to achieve them fully by 2000.

42. Educational and health policies in Brazil were being decentralized, to enhance public participation in funding allocation. Child mortality rates had fallen sharply and there had been a significant improvement in children's nutritional health. Resources for basic education had been increased threefold to provide for better training and remuneration of teachers, as well as more classrooms.

43. Brazil attached great importance to the protection of children in particularly difficult circumstances and fully supported the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the impact of armed conflict on children, whose recommendations should be carried forward. The suffering of children affected by armed conflict should be alleviated, through, *inter alia*, an optional protocol that would raise the minimum level of protection afforded under the Convention.

44. Brazil considered the adoption of the draft optional protocol related to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography as vital to supplementing articles 34 and 35 of the Convention. To that end, the Brazilian Government had maintained a meaningful dialogue with the

Special Rapporteur on that issue and encouraged all countries to follow suit.

45. Brazil had established a national network to combat sexual exploitation, while certain state and municipal governments had developed their own plans of action, and a national campaign had been launched against child sex tourism.

46. Brazil sought to repress child labour by attacking the problem at the root. It had set up monitoring mechanisms and offered alternatives to families whose survival often depended on child labour. However, a comprehensive approach was required. Brazil was working with ILO on that issue and supported its efforts to draft a new international convention on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

47. **Ms. De Armas** (Cuba) said that it would require real political will to prevent half a million women a year from dying as a result of complications with pregnancy and childbirth, to provide education to millions of children of school age that did not attend school, to help millions of children trapped in dangerous child labour and to provide adequate sewage facilities to billions of people, whose health was threatened by poor sanitation. Political will was equally important to save the lives of the millions of children who died from malnutrition each year.

48. The United Nations system, particularly UNICEF, deserved praise for the concrete results they had secured on behalf of the world's children. For its part, Cuba had a national programme of action for the comprehensive development of Cuban children. The Government had worked hard to overcome its difficulties and ensure access to universal free education and health services, particularly for children. The infant mortality rate stood at 7.2 per 1,000 live births, while several diseases, including polio, had been eliminated. All Cuban children received a basic education.

49. However, efforts at the national level were not enough. In several parts of the world, structural limitations could only be overcome through concerted action at the supra-national level. There was a need for a new philosophy of international solidarity, to help developing countries implement their national plans to follow-up the World Summit for Children. Most nations could not provide even the most rudimentary children's education.

50. The few States that had still to ratify or accede to the Convention on the Rights of the Child should do so without delay, while greater national and international efforts were needed to secure practical benefits from the Convention.

51. In many parts of the world, children's lives were devastated by child prostitution and child pornography, trafficking in children, child labour, homelessness, the effects of armed conflict, the illegal sale of organs, fraudulent adoptions and high mortality rates.

52. Cuba supported the work of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and of the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, and would continue to participate in the drafting of the two optional protocols on those issues.

53. The Cuban Government had demonstrated its universal concern for children, through provision of free medical services to many countries, of education for children and students from all over the world, and of medical assistance to victims of major disasters. It would continue to design programmes and policies that reflected the Cuban Government's commitment to comprehensive development for children.

54. **Mr. De Saram** (Sri Lanka) said that, as eloquently affirmed in the report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, (A/53/482) the use of children in armed conflict was a horrendous evil and all governmental and non-governmental entities must commit themselves to eradicating it. Sri Lanka supported the strategies outlined in that report, but noted that funding remained a serious constraint.

55. Although reference had been made to Sri Lanka in the report, it was the opinion of his Government that such reference did not convey an accurate picture of the situation. The unfortunate juxtaposition of references to the Government and to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a ruthless terrorist organization, created an erroneous impression, perhaps unwittingly, that the LTTE was an entity on a par with the Government. After recounting a series of atrocities committed by the LTTE, he said that, despite the commitment given to the Special Representative, the LTTE had continued to force children as young as 13 years of age into armed combat.

56. Sri Lanka understood the plight of children brutalized by the LTTE and was devising a programme to promote their psychological recovery, education and vocational training. His Government believed that the Special Representative should make a public statement about the abominable abuse of children by the LTTE. The Special Representative's report contained a number of recommendations which should be carefully considered by all States in order to protect children from the scourge of war.

57. Paragraph 140, however, should be given thorough scrutiny. His delegation was unable to understand why it was important that concerned Governments should incorporate the protection of children prominently in their foreign policies. The protection of children was, on the other hand, an important aspect of Governments' domestic policy. Furthermore, the reference to "international actors" in that paragraph was not clear. Sri Lanka welcomed that recommendation on the understanding that it applied to non-State actors as well, such as the LTTE, which derived financial support for the purchase of weapons from sympathizers in certain affluent countries. In addition, his delegation considered that paragraph 152 of the report, on preventing conflicts at the source, was a general recommendation and did not indicate any intention on the part of the Special Representative to attempt to settle disputes. Sri Lanka would not favour any such initiative. While it might be impossible to prevent conflicts altogether, it was essential to try to prevent the adverse effects that such conflicts had on children. In conclusion, his delegation expressed its appreciation for the report of the Special Representative and his dedication to the cause of children who were exploited and brutalized in some countries.

58. **Mr. Bocalandro** (Argentina) said that the fundamental importance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was becoming increasingly evident. The Convention enjoyed almost universal support and served as a foundation for the activities of UNICEF and other United Nations bodies on behalf of children. He urged States which had not yet done so to accede to the Convention as soon as possible. Initiatives taken for the protection of children affected by armed conflict, including the appointment of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, deserved the full support of the entire international community.

59. In Argentina, the provisions of the Convention were directly applicable and did not require additional national legislation. Furthermore, a recently drafted bill would establish the identity and nationality of newborn infants and enhance children's overall development. Judicial investigation of the kidnapping of children under the military regime between 1976 and 1983 were under way. Progress could also be noted in the proposed establishment of a "Defender of the Rights of the Child" and an amendment to the Civil Code concerning adoption that would give primacy to the interests of the child. Argentina was in the process of approving an Inter-American convention on international trafficking in minors, adopted at the Fifth Inter-American Specialized Conference on Private International Law. Trafficking in children should be given the utmost attention. Moreover, States should be aware of the seriousness of conflict of laws which did not take the interests of the child into consideration as parties sought to resolve kidnapping cases involving two or more countries.

60. Compulsory schooling for children up to 14 years of age had been in effect in Argentina since 1884. In 1993, a law had been adopted providing for 10 years' free compulsory education at the municipal, provincial and national levels.

61. Argentina reiterated its commitment to the welfare of children as an investment in the future.

62. **Ms. McVey** (Canada) welcomed the work accomplished by the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography and by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Much work nevertheless remained to be done in the promotion and protection of children's rights.

63. Canada was concerned about the use of the Internet to disseminate child pornography and prostitution and was working with other governments, through the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the United Nations and other bodies, to prevent the Internet from becoming a safe haven for those who sought to harm children. The finalization of the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child related to the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography was an objective for the tenth anniversary of the Convention. Round tables aimed at increasing awareness of the commercial sexual exploitation of children had been organized, and legislation had been put in place for the prosecution of Canadians involved in such crimes.

64. The plight of war-affected children, in particular the emerging trend towards targeting children both as fighters and as victims, was one of the most disturbing human-security issues facing the world. Canada placed a premium on partnerships between Governments and non-governmental organizations, as they were crucial for identifying ways to assist those children. It had hosted two round tables on that issue.

65. With regard to the draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child related to children affected by armed conflict, Canada was reviewing its defence legislation in preparation for ratification of the protocol once adopted. In the same vein, Canada strongly supported the inclusion of a provision in the Statute of the International Criminal Court criminalizing the practice of recruitment and use of child soldiers. Assistance to children affected by armed conflict should constitute a key

component of future peace support operations missions. She endorsed Special Representative's recommendation that the standards for peacekeeping personnel should be strengthened. Similarly, human rights and humanitarian norms to protect war-affected children should be more systematically incorporated into the policies and procedures of United Nations bodies.

66. Canada had contributed to the International Labour Organization's programmes on child labour, and supported efforts for a simple and effective legal instrument acceptable to the largest possible number of member States. Her Government was also following up on the Agenda for Action adopted at the International Conference on Child Labour held in Oslo in 1997.

67. In support of the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, the Government had hosted the International Summit of Sexually Exploited in March 1998, attended by youth delegates from the Americas who had been victims of commercial sex exploitation. Canada was funding support for rehabilitation and counselling, education, training and reintegration for the youth of several developing countries attending the Summit.

68. The success of the Convention on the Rights of the Child had placed considerable demands on the Committee on the Rights of the Child in terms of its capacity to consider reports submitted by States parties. Accordingly, Canada hoped that other States parties would soon deposit their instruments of acceptance of the amendment to increase membership of the Committee to 18.

69. In conclusion, she called attention to a two-year travelling exhibit of children's drawings during which local children would be invited to illustrate their understanding of human rights. In the drawings submitted to date, children had expressed their right to food, shelter, education and play, as well as the right to express their opinions, and to protection from abuse. She urged States parties to commit themselves to ensuring that those rights were met.

70. **Mr. Rahmanov** (Turkmenistan) said that the rights of children were the most human among the human rights and the pursuit of those rights was most inspiring for the future. His delegation expressed its gratitude to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and also to UNICEF, Governments organizations, civil society and individuals that had spared no effort in the promotion of the rights of the child. He lauded the initiative to declare the period 2001 to 2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.

71. Turkmenistan, in cooperation with UNICEF, had been very successful in the provision of social services to children. Particular attention had been placed on education, health, maternal and infant mortality and a clean water supply in the Aral Sea area. In the wake of the Aral Sea environmental catastrophe, there remained a major threat of birth defects and maternal mortality. He urged donor countries to continue to assist UNICEF in ensuring the basic right to life to the children of that area.

72. Turkmenistan welcomed universal commitment to children's rights, but acknowledged that there was much unfinished business: the death toll of children, which stood at over 12 million annually, was largely attributable to poverty. Children living in poverty were deprived of education and were extremely vulnerable to health-related problems, child exploitation and violence. However, the possibilities of shaping their development were almost endless. Since a child's environment played a predominant role, his Government welcomed the approach taken by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General towards the problem of military exploitation of children, and encouraged concerned countries to give him their full support.

73. His delegation stressed the importance of concluding an optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child to protect children under the age of 18 from military recruitment. It also supported the move to increase the number of members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child.

74. As one of the first to sign and ratify the Convention relating to anti-personnel mines, Turkmenistan reiterated its position on the elimination of landmines, as they should no longer be allowed to kill and maim millions of children worldwide.

75. **Mr. McKenzie** (Trinidad and Tobago) said that the near universal ratification of or accession to the Convention on the Rights of the Child had made it the most widely accepted human-rights treaty in history, and was a manifestation by the international community of its commitment to the promotion and protection of children's rights. That commitment had been underscored by the entry into force of the Convention in 1990, thus coinciding with the World Summit for Children, which had adopted a World Declaration and Plan of Action.

76. Trinidad and Tobago had ratified the Convention in 1991 and had submitted its initial report in 1996. Since then, the Government had undertaken several initiatives to

promote the welfare of children and to achieve national awareness, including the establishment of an inter-ministerial committee to formulate and implement a national plan of action.

77. At the global level, tremendous progress had been made during the past decade, particularly in the health field. It seemed, however, that many of the goals set by the World Summit might not be achieved. One such goal, concerning the reduction of the under-five mortality rate, had been achieved by Trinidad and Tobago. Its under-five mortality rate stood at 17 per 1,000 live births for 1996. Major features of the national health programme included immunization coverage, the integration of school health services into the primary health care system, reduced child malnutrition and increased food subsidies.

78. Since independence, Trinidad and Tobago had placed considerable emphasis on education, which continued to rank among the largest item of government expenditure. Free, compulsory primary education in public and government-assisted schools had raised enrolment levels to 96 per cent and the enrolment of girls as a percentage of boys was considered one of the highest in the world according to the 1998 *Human Development Report*. School education had developed rapidly over the past decade, and special education, through improved programmes and facilities for teachers, had received greater attention. Efforts had been made to integrate children with special needs into the regular education system.

79. More than ever, there was need to provide special protection for children in order to discourage their involvement in harmful activities. The phenomena of street children, child labourers and sexual exploitation of children were usually more prevalent in difficult economic and social circumstances. His Government, with the assistance of UNICEF, had concluded studies aimed at obtaining information on the most disadvantaged children. The Government provided assistance to non-governmental organizations and to shelters for street children in the form of financial aid and training for care-givers. A central registry would monitor the status of children in need of special protection. Other important measures included grants to organizations catering for abused children, counselling services and extensive codification of child and family laws. Amendments had been made to the Children Act, while the facility of inter-country adoption and the establishment of a Family Court were under review.

80. In its preparation for the review of the outcome of the World Summit for Children, he urged the international community to ensure that those accomplishments would not be reversed. Children deserved to be nurtured and to be provided with an environment conducive to their physical, mental, emotional and moral development. Furthermore, the United Nations system must continue to work for overall social and economic development so that the hope, education and vision instilled in the world's children would not be frustrated through a lack of employment opportunities in the years to come.

81. **Mr. Al-Humaimidi** (Iraq) said that both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and related international instruments stressed the importance of guaranteeing children's fundamental rights, with regard to their physical, intellectual, moral, spiritual and social development and to a life lived in freedom and dignity. Those instruments acknowledged that children were vulnerable and required special protection.

82. Nonetheless, millions of children throughout the world were denied their basic rights as a result of sexual abuse, economic exploitation, the impact of armed conflict and, as in the case of Iraq, economic sanctions. The international community needed to do more to ensure the full realization of the provisions of those instruments and the goals of the World Summit for Children.

83. The Iraqi Government had adopted legislation concerning social protection and rehabilitation of children, child welfare and compulsory education. However, eight years of sanctions had undone many of those achievements, with disastrous consequences for children's health and nutrition. According to the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 4 of resolution 1143 (1997), (S/1998/477), the preliminary results of a nutritional survey of some 15,000 children in Iraq indicated that the nutritional situation of children under five had remained unchanged since March 1997. Over one third of children were suffering from chronic or acute malnutrition and one quarter were underweight.

84. According to UNICEF, an additional 90,000 deaths a year were caused by the sanctions. The oil-for-food plan had failed to provide adequate protection for Iraqi children against malnutrition and disease. Children who had been spared from death continued to be denied their basic rights, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

85. The suffering which the sanctions had inflicted on the children and people of Iraq clearly reflected the desire of certain parties to annihilate and destroy the Iraqi people. The sanctions should be lifted forthwith, so that Iraqi children could once more enjoy the rights afforded to them under the Convention.

86. **Mr. Matute** (Peru) said his delegation associated itself with the statement made on behalf of the Rio Group. He referred to the international community's responsibility in protecting the rights of children and stressed the enormous amount of work which remained to be done. He observed that, as the United Nations prepared to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was the most universally accepted convention in history; as a signatory, Peru was actively pursuing policies to ensure appropriate treatment of children's issues.

87. After years of turmoil, his Government had undertaken structural reforms to promote economic stability, the normalization of international economic and financial relations and peace, and to eliminate terrorism and drug trafficking, two plagues on Peruvian society. As a result, positive new conditions had been created for sustainable economic growth while at the same time meeting the challenge of promoting human development.

88. In giving priority to the commitments arising out of the World Summit for Children, his Government had undertaken social policies based on the fight against extreme poverty and the development of the most vulnerable segments of the populations, children and women. It had passed laws and promoted programmes to protect the rights of children and adolescents and created a ministry for the promotion of women and human development, which was responsible for questions related to children and for the national action plan for children for the period 1996-2000.

89. It had also offered to host in Lima the Fourth Ministerial Meeting on Children and Social Policy in the Americas to be held from 25 to 27 November 1998. That meeting, to be attended by some 37 countries in the Americas, in addition to Spain and Portugal, would strengthen the objectives for the decade, evaluate progress and remaining challenges in achieving the objectives of the Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children and establish local and regional objectives for children's well-being. A regional plan of action to provide guidance for children's policies and improve the living conditions of the region's children while promoting sustainable development was being prepared. That document would identify major themes and contribute to increasing the efficacy of national plans in the area of children's rights, especially regarding such issues as maternal mortality, low birth weight, nutrition, education, sanitation and drinking water.

90. As part of the implementation of the outcome of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development, Peru would participate in the forthcoming meeting of the working group on the 20/20 initiative, to be held in Viet Nam at the end of October. That initiative, would have set forth in paragraph 17 of General Assembly resolution 50/161, interested industrialized and developing countries to allocate more resources to basic social programmes. The participants fully recognized that the Convention on the Rights of the Child guaranteed that no child should be deprived of the right to the enjoyment of basic social services. He reiterated his delegation's commitment to children and recognized its shared responsibility for social development on a practical level.

91. **Ms. Odera** (Kenya) expressed her profound regret that the changing nature and scope of conflict had made children not only the victims but also the instruments of war. Apart from the real risks of injury, permanent disability or even death, child soldiers who survived had the additional handicap of psychological problems for which long-term assistance would be required in order to heal them and reintegrate them into society. The use of children as "armed labour", particularly in refugee situations, was of special concern.

92. Her delegation welcomed the cooperation between the Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict and the United Nations system and supported the initiatives he had proposed. She also welcomed the inclusion of a provision on the use of child soldiers in the Statute of the International Criminal Court as a war crime and was encouraged that the international community had thereby shown an interest in criminalizing specific acts of violence against children.

93. Her delegation was also disturbed by the alarming growth in the sale and trafficking in children, child prostitution, child pornography, the commercial exploitation of children, often by well-organized syndicates, and the expansion of child sex tourism. The latter was of special concern for her delegation, since Kenya was a major tourist destination and she stressed the importance of closer international cooperation in addressing that issue. She referred to the increasing use of the Internet and other electronic media for commercial sexual exploitation and agreed with the Special Rapporteur that all parties, including media practitioners, must cooperate in eliminating that menace.

94. Her Government had endeavoured to implement the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, creating a task force to review the law relating to the rights of children, and strengthening the children's department to better cope with the challenges of street children and child prostitutes. It continued to maintain free primary education

in State schools, although that was threatened by the country's heavy external debt.

95. She showed that the future of humankind could be assured only if the rights of the children of today were safeguarded. Children had a right to a happy and safe environment, and Governments and non-governmental organizations had an obligation to provide special protection to children whether in situations of conflict or peace.

96. **Mr. Beyendeza** (Uganda) said that it was imperative that the formidable body of human-rights instruments and commitments should be translated into action in order to make a tangible difference in the lives of children exposed to danger. As a party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, his Government was making every effort to implement the Convention. It was committed to decentralizing the national plan of action, improving coordination among various governmental and non-governmental agencies responsible for the welfare of children, increasing public awareness of children's issues and taking steps towards universal primary education.

97. His Government recognized its responsibility for the security of the country's children and was making every effort to promote and protect their rights in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. During the past 10 years, however, at a time when much of Uganda had been moving steadily towards economic progress and political stability, the northern region of the country had been engulfed in a vicious conflict waged by the Lord's Resistance Army, which used abduction to terrorize the local population and to sustain its army. Organizations such as UNICEF had reported on the appalling situation of children in that region, where thousands of children – some even as young as four years old – had been forcibly recruited by the Lord's Resistance Army.

98. He called for the full implementation of the relevant instruments on the rights of the child and appealed to the international community for more support as his Government sought to ensure the unconditional release of those children. He expressed his delegation's appreciation to all those countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations which had provided support to the families of the abducted children and to his Government in its efforts to find a lasting solution to that tragedy.

99. **Mr. Jovanovic** (Observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that the tragedy of children affected by armed conflict was a priority for ICRC in its role as the protector of the victims of armed conflicts and the guardian of international humanitarian law. He expressed satisfaction at the growing international awareness of that problem and its effect on the future development of countries in conflict situations. Thanks to the efforts of the Special Representative, that issue had been raised in the Security Council and he reaffirmed his organization's commitment to work with the Special Representative and share its expertise in the area of international humanitarian law. He also stressed the importance of meetings such as the World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth held in Lisbon in August 1998 which, in its final Declaration, had made a commitment to preventing the participation of children in armed conflicts. More work needed to be done, however, in order to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

100. On an operational level, ICRC was concentrating on: identifying and registering unaccompanied children; visiting child prisoners and requesting their liberation or their internment in quarters separate from those of adults, except of course in the case of family groups; and food and medical assistance. It was also working towards the development and implementation of international norms in order to ensure children double protection not only as civilians but also as a particularly vulnerable group.

101. Given the alarming numbers of children under the age of 15 participating in armed conflicts, he expressed satisfaction at the inclusion of a provision on the use of children under 15 as a war crime in the Statute of the International Criminal Court, but said that, in addition to participation in combat, related activities such as reconnaissance, espionage, sabotage, and the use of children as decoys, messengers or at checkpoints, should also be criminalized.

102. ICRC supported the adoption of an optional protocol to the Convention forbidding any participation by children under 18 years of age in hostilities, which would be applicable to all parties to a conflict, including armed groups. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement had also adopted a plan of action for the child victims of armed conflicts aimed at preventing the involvement of those under 18 and at developing concrete action to protect and assist them, including their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

103. **Mr. Lisk** (Observer for the International Labour Organization (ILO)) said that, despite the growing use of child labour throughout the world, progress had been made in addressing that problem, as evidenced by the increased involvement by the United Nations system, Governments

and non-governmental organizations and by the growing determination to eliminate the most intolerable forms of child labour. For example, ILO member States had called almost unanimously for a new convention on that issue.

104. The first part of the ILO strategy was the elaboration of international legal norms to help member States progressively abolish child labour through national legislation and regulation. The Minimum Age Convention (No. 138, 1973) was the fundamental international standard on child labour and was covered by the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work adopted by the International Labour Conference in June 1998, which committed all members to promote the fundamental rights of children through the abolition of child labour. A new international instrument, to be adopted at the next International Labour Conference in June 1999, would apply to all persons under the age of 18 and call for the immediate elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including slavery and similar practices, child prostitution and the use of children for illegal activities, particularly the drug trade. Fundamental to achieving the goals of the proposed convention were measures of prevention and direct assistance to children to remove them from the worst forms of child labour and provide for their rehabilitation and integration. Given the international dimension of such activities as trafficking in women and children, the new convention would also require member States to cooperate with one another.

105. The second part of the strategy was technical assistance to member States in the development of practical action, essentially through the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), which gave priority to the most extreme forms of child labour, prostitution and trafficking, especially for children below 12 years of age and girls. The ILO secretariat had also developed a methodological approach for national child labour surveys which had contributed to identifying areas of highest concentration of child labour and the types of risks to which children were exposed.

106. He stressed the need for a broad alliance to deal with the problem of child labour. Governments had the primary responsibility but employers, workers, non-governmental organizations and voluntary groups played a key role in promoting socially responsible entrepreneurship and working conditions. There was a growing consensus that child labour, especially its worst abuses, must be stopped and ILO was committed to that objective.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.